

THE ICONOGRAPHY OF SYMEON WITH THE CHRIST CHILD IN BYZANTINE ART*

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IT is now generally recognized that the twelfth century was a period in which Byzantine artists took a new interest in human drama and psychology. Of no subject in their repertoire was this more true than the Presentation of Christ in the Temple. In some twelfth-century versions of the scene, such as the miniature in the Rockefeller-McCormick New Testament in Chicago, the old Symeon holds the infant in a tender embrace, while Mary makes a gesture of grief which foreshadows her mourning at the Crucifixion; at the same time the child shows his anxiety by looking back and reaching with one hand for his mother (fig. 1).¹ The purpose of this paper is to trace the development of Presentation scenes of this type in Byzantine art, against the background of the sermons and poetry of the Byzantine church. The study falls into two sections. The first traces the image of Symeon holding the Christ Child in Middle and Late Byzantine art and suggests an important literary source for this new way of visualizing the Presentation. The second section concentrates on the grief of the Virgin, showing how this detail of Byzantine iconography corresponds to a common convention in the hymns and homilies.

SYMEON WITH THE CHRIST CHILD

According to the surviving evidence, Byzantine artists made an important change in the iconography of the Presentation after the end of the iconoclastic controversy in the ninth

century.² In the remaining preiconoclastic versions of the scene, such as the mosaic discovered on the site of the Kalenderhane Mosque in Istanbul (fig. 2),³ the rule is for Mary to hold the infant Christ in her hands as she prepares to give him to the aged priest Symeon, who approaches submissively to receive the Messiah. However, after the end of Iconoclasm the Byzantines began to depict Christ already in the arms of Symeon. The earliest recorded portrayal of Symeon holding the Christ Child was in the church of the Virgin of the Source in Constantinople, which the Emperor Basil I, together with his co-rulers Leo and Constantine, restored after 869. A description of the Gospel scenes in this church is preserved in a series of epigrams in the Palatine Anthology which were written by Ignatius the Magister Grammaticorum. The poem on the Presentation specifies that it was the priest, not the mother, who was shown with the child, for it reads: "The baby now seen in the old man's arms is the ancient Creator of time."⁴ A similar description of a Presentation mosaic survives from the pen of Basil's successor, Leo the Wise, who saw the scene depicted in a church built between 886 and ca. 893

* The standard work on the iconography of the Presentation in medieval art is D. C. Shorr, "The Iconographic Development of the Presentation in the Temple," *ArtB*, 28 (1946), 17-32. On Byzantine art, see also A. Xyngopoulos, "Υπαπαντή," in *Επ. Έτ.Βυλ.Σπ.*, 6 (1929), 328-39; K. Wessel, "Darstellung Christi im Tempel," *RBK*, I (Stuttgart, 1966), 1142; S. Boyd, "The Church of the Panagia Amasgou, Monagri, Cyprus, and Its Wallpaintings," *DOP*, 28 (1974), 294f. and note 62; L. Hadermann-Misguich, "La peinture monumentale tardocomnène," *XV^e Congrès International d'Etudes Byzantines, Rapports*, III, *Art et archéologie* (Athens, 1976), 126.

² C. L. Striker and Y. D. Kuban, "Work at Kalenderhane Camii in Istanbul: Third and Fourth Preliminary Reports," *DOP*, 25 (1971), 255-57, fig. 11.

⁴ "Ὁρώμενος νῦν χερσὶ πρεσβύτου βρέφος παλαιός ἐστι δημιουργὸς τῶν χρόνων." *Anthologia graeca*, book I, no. 113, ed. W. R. Paton (London, 1916), 49.

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¹ The University of Chicago, Joseph Regenstein Library, MS 965, fol. 59v. On the date of this manuscript (last third of the twelfth century), see A. Cutler and A. Weyl Carr, "The Psalter Benaki 34.3," *REB*, 34 (1976), 281ff., esp. 317.

by his father-in-law, Stylianus Zaoutzes. Here, too, Christ was said to be carried by Symeon: "Now a man worn out by old age embraces the infant."⁵ A third description of a mosaic depicting the child held by Symeon is to be found in the poem by Constantine the Rhodian which describes the decoration of the church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople, and which was composed between 931 and 944. Constantine, also, speaks of the "old man Symeon carrying Christ as a baby in his arms."⁶ The date of the mosaics described by Constantine the Rhodian is uncertain, but since Basil I is known to have made major repairs to the Holy Apostles after the end of Iconoclasm, it is possible that the mosaics date from his time.⁷ It may perhaps be objected that these ninth- and tenth-century writers did not necessarily give a literally accurate picture of the scenes they purported to describe, since the "baby in the old man's arms" was a familiar cliché of Byzantine literature which also occurs in sermons and hymns on the Presentation.⁸ However, it is significant that the one surviving preiconoclastic description of a Presentation in Byzantine art specifies that it was *Mary* who was shown with the child; for, in his account of the sixth-century decoration of St. Sergius at Gaza, the orator Choricus tells us that: "The mother is present, holding the

child in her arms."⁹ Choricus' description thus corresponds with the evidence of the remaining preiconoclastic works of art, such as the mosaic at the Kalenderhane Mosque (fig. 2).

Apart from an insecurely dated fresco in the cave church of St. Eustathius at Göreme,¹⁰ the earliest surviving works of art which portray Christ in Symeon's arms are from Western Europe. The image was reproduced three times in a series of books painted at Echternach in the eleventh century for the German imperial house. The best known of these manuscripts, the Golden Gospels in the Germanisches National-Museum in Nuremberg, depicts Symeon cradling the Christ Child close to his body, while Mary holds the doves for the sacrifice; the infant and the old man turn their heads toward each other, so that they are almost touching (fig. 3).¹¹ In the other two manuscripts from Echternach, the Gospel Lectionary dated 1039-41 in Bremen, and the Golden Gospels of 1045-46 in the Escorial Library, Symeon is also shown holding Christ in his arms, but the effect is less intimate because the child turns away from the old priest to look at his mother.¹² Since the scriptorium at Echternach worked under a strong Byzantine influence, and a Byzantine artist actually participated in the painting of the Gospel Book in the Escorial, it is very possible that the image of Symeon holding Christ was derived from a Byzantine model.¹³ The earliest preserved Byzantine manuscript which portrays Symeon with the child in his arms is a Gospel Book of the third quarter of the eleventh century, now in

⁵ Νῦν δὲ ἀνὴρ τρυχόμενος ὑπὸ γήρως τὸ νήπιον ἀγκαλίζεται· Λέοντος τοῦ Σοφοῦ πανηγυρικοὶ λόγοι, ed. Akakios (Athens, 1868), 277; trans. C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312-1453* (Englewood Cliffs, 1972), 204. For a discussion of this text, see A. Frolov, "Deux églises byzantines," *EtByz*, 3 (1945), 43-51.

⁶ . . . αὐτὸν Συμεὼν τὸν πρεσβύτερον, φέροντα Χριστὸν ὡς βρέφος ταῖς ἀγκάλαις. Ed. E. Legrand, in "Description des œuvres d'art et de l'église des Saints-Apôtres de Constantinople: poème en vers iambiques par Constantin le Rhodien," *REG*, 9 (1896), 36-65, v. 780ff. On the date of the poem, see G. Downey, "Constantine the Rhodian, His Life and Writings," *Late Classical and Mediaeval Studies in Honor of Albert Mathias Friend, Jr.*, ed. K. Weitzmann (Princeton, 1955), 212-21.

⁷ According to his grandson Constantine VII, Basil buttressed the structure and "...stripped off its old age and took off its wrinkles..." (...καὶ ἀποξέσας τὸ ἀπὸ χρόνου γήρας καὶ τὰς ῥυτίδας περιελών...). Theophanes Continuatus, PG, 109, col. 337D.

⁸ See, for example, the Prooimion of the *Kontakion* on the Presentation by Romanos, . . . καὶ βρέφος βασιταχθεὶς ἐν ἀγκάλαις πρεσβύτου. . . . Ed. J. Grosdidier de Matons, II (Paris, 1965), 174.

⁹ Πάρεστι γὰρ τὸ παιδίον ἐνδεμένη ταῖς ἀγκάλαις ἡ μήτηρ. *Laudatio Marciani*, I, 56, ed. R. Foerster and E. Richsteig, Teubner (1929); trans. Mango, *op. cit.*, 65.

¹⁰ See Shorr, *op. cit.*, 24, fig. 16.

¹¹ P. Metz, *Das Goldene Evangelienbuch von Echternach im Germanischen National-Museum zu Nürnberg* (Munich, 1956), 52, pl. 30.

¹² A. Boeckler, *Das Goldene Evangelienbuch Heinrichs III.* (Berlin, 1933), pls. 113 (Escorial Gospels, fol. 97), 189 (Bremen, Staatsbibliothek MS b. 21, fol. 104).

¹³ *Ibid.*, 59. On Byzantine influence at Echternach, see also P. Schweinfurth, "Das Goldene Evangelienbuch Heinrichs III. und Byzanz," *ZKunstg*, 10 (1942), 42-66; K. Weitzmann, "The Various Aspects of the Byzantine Influence on the Latin Countries from the Sixth to the Twelfth Centuries," *DOP*, 20 (1966), 4; C. Nordenfalk, *Codex Caesareus Upsaliensis* (Stockholm, 1971), 144 note 1.

the National Library in Vienna (fig. 4).¹⁴ The principal difference between this Byzantine miniature and the paintings from Echternach lies in the characterization of Symeon; the Byzantine artist has created a more dramatic portrait of the priest as an ancient man with stooped back and furrowed brows, perhaps in order to capture the force of the literary antithesis of the "baby in the old man's arms."

The iconography of Symeon holding Christ seems to have become increasingly popular in Byzantine art in the course of the second half of the twelfth century. It appears in the frescoes of the Mirož monastery at Pskov, which date to shortly before 1156,¹⁵ and then in a series of late twelfth- and early thirteenth-century works in different media and from different parts of the Byzantine world. In many of these portrayals of the Presentation there is a strong element of sentiment. In the fresco of St. Nicholas tou Kasnitzē at Kastoria in Macedonia, for example, there is a dramatic contrast between the tender stance of Symeon, who inclines his face toward the infant cradled in his arms, and the lively actions of the child, who kicks his feet and strains to reach for his mother (fig. 5).¹⁶ In the church of St. Stephen in the same town we find Symeon pressing Christ close to his body and even resting his face upon the child's head, while Mary stands by still anxiously holding onto one of her son's hands (fig. 6).¹⁷ In the church of the Panagia tou Arakou at Lagoudera on Cyprus, which was painted in 1192, there is a remarkable fresco which isolates the image of Symeon holding Christ from the rest of the Presentation scene and displays it as a separate icon (fig. 10).¹⁸ Here, as in the other late twelfth-century paintings, the artist has set out to achieve the maximum contrast between youth and age. Symeon's years are shown in his long white hair, his creased brows, and his wrinkled cheeks; he gently touches his lined face against the head of the child, who pulls with a lively

gesture at the old man's robe.¹⁹ Equally emotive portrayals of Symeon with the infant Christ can be found in late twelfth-century icons and manuscript paintings, such as a tetrptych at Mount Sinai (fig. 9),²⁰ and in the miniature in the Rockefeller-McCormick New Testament in Chicago (fig. 1),²¹ both of which depict the old man resting his cheek against the head of the child.

The iconography of Symeon holding the Christ Child continued to be popular in Byzantine art of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Although the depiction of human emotion in the later Presentation scenes tended to be less intense than it had been at the end of the twelfth century, there were still some portrayals of Symeon inclining his head to touch or all but touch the child, and of the child seeking to return to his mother's arms. In an early thirteenth-century fresco in the church of Panagia Amasgou at Monagri on Cyprus, for example, the child reaches anxiously for his mother (fig. 8),²² while in the fourteenth-century wall-painting at the monastery of Marko in Macedonia, even though the old priest clasps the infant tightly against his face, the child still manages to stretch his right arm toward Mary, who waits to one side.²³ In some fourteenth-century

¹⁹ Symeon was also portrayed touching, or nearly touching, the child's head with his cheek in the late twelfth-century frescoes of the Presentation in the church of the Hagioi Anargyroi at Kastoria (Pelekanidis, *op. cit.*, pl. 16) and in the monastery of Bačkovovo (A. Grabar, *La Peinture religieuse en Bulgarie* [Paris, 1928], text, fig. 10). At Kurbinovo (L. Hadermann-Misguich, *Kurbinovo* [Brussels, 1975], 119, fig. 48) and in the mosaic at Monreale (E. Kitzinger, *The Mosaics of Monreale* [Palermo, 1960], fig. 4) Symeon was depicted holding Christ, but not resting his face against the child.

²⁰ G. and M. Sotiriou, *Icons du Mont Sinai*, I (Athens, 1956), pl. 78; *ibid.*, II (1958), 91.

²¹ See *supra*, note 1. A miniature of the related Gospels from Karahissar in the Leningrad State Library (MS gr. 105, fol. 114) also depicts Symeon embracing the child, but isolates the image, as in the fresco at Lagoudera; see Shorr, *op. cit.* (note 2 *supra*), 24, fig. 20.

²² Boyd, *op. cit.* (note 2 *supra*), 294f., figs. 19, 22.

²³ For other thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Presentation scenes in which Symeon touches or nearly touches his head against the child, see G. Millet, *La Peinture du moyen âge en Yougoslavie*, II (Paris, 1957), pl. 73,1 (fresco at Arilje); *idem*, *Monuments byzantins de Mistra* (Paris, 1910), pls. 66,1 (fresco in the Metropolis), 140,1 (fresco in the Pantanassa).

¹⁴ MS theol. gr. 154, fol. 143; see H. Gerstinger, *Die griechische Buchmalerei* (Vienna, 1926), 33f., fig. 13d.

¹⁵ I. Tolstoi and N. P. Kondakov, *Russkija drevnosti*, VI (St. Petersburg, 1899), fig. 219.

¹⁶ S. Pelekanidis, *Καστορία*, I, *Βυζαντινὰ τοιχογραφαί* (Thessaloniki, 1953), pl. 49b.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pl. 92b.

¹⁸ A. and J. Stylianou, *The Painted Churches of Cyprus* (Cyprus, 1964), 76-77, fig. 32.

paintings the child struggles more actively against the embrace of the old man. In a miniature of a menologium in Oxford the infant leans back in Symeon's arms, turns his head around to look at his mother, and pushes with both hands against Symeon's chest (fig. 7),²⁴ while in the fresco of St. Demetrius at Peć the child seems even to recoil from his greeter.²⁵ The iconography of Symeon holding the child was finally codified in the Painter's Manual of Dionysius of Fourna, an eighteenth-century compilation which was based in part on earlier sources.²⁶

To sum up, the image of Symeon holding Christ is first recorded in descriptions of churches which were decorated in the ninth century. However, the earliest examples of the motif which still survive and which can be securely dated belong to the first half of the eleventh century. In the second half of the twelfth century the motif became extremely popular and was imbued with a high degree of sentiment; it continued as an established type in the iconography of later Byzantine art.

If we turn from Byzantine art to Byzantine literature, we find that among the sermons devoted to the Presentation there is one which places a particular stress on the holding of the Christ Child by Symeon, and upon the human sentiment which this action implied.²⁷ By the twelfth century this sermon had been incorporated into collections of homilies which were arranged according to the liturgical calendar. But there was some uncertainty concerning its authorship, for the manuscripts divide their attributions equally between Athanasius of Alexandria, who lived in the fourth century, and George of Nicomedia, who lived in the ninth.²⁸

²⁴ Bodleian Library, MS gr. th. f. 1, fol. 2v: O. Pächt, *Byzantine Illumination* (Oxford, 1952), 8f., fig. 16; I. Hutter, *Corpus der byzantinischen Miniaturenhandschriften*, II, *Oxford Bodleian Library*, 2 (Stuttgart, 1978), 2, fig. 3.

²⁵ V. R. Petković, *La peinture serbe du moyen âge*, II (Belgrade, 1934), pl. 87.

²⁶ "Saint Symeon the Receiver of God holding Christ as a baby in his arms..." (ὁ ἅγιος Συμεὼν ὁ Θεοδόχος βαστῶν τὸν Χριστὸν ὡς βρέφος εἰς τὰς ἀγκάλας του...). Ed. A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Manuel d'iconographie chrétienne* (St. Petersburg, 1909), 87.

²⁷ PG, 28, cols. 973–1000.

²⁸ The sermon is attributed to Athanasius in: Vatican, MS Regin. gr. 15 (12th century); Lyons, MS 625 (12th century); Vatican, MS gr. 1079 (14th

The homily describes the drama of the Presentation step by step and in great detail. It begins with an account of how the Spirit rapidly brought Symeon "like a person with wings" to the temple,²⁹ and then goes on to tell of Mary's initial reluctance to part with her baby: "[The mother] held [the infant] back a little, for she did not yet clearly know that the old man had arrived at the temple in the Spirit. But then, when she saw the divine baby leaping in her arms and striving to jump out into his hands, she more quickly recognized the force of the mystery, and gave over the child to the outstretched hands of the old man."³⁰ As Mary hands over the child, she makes a remarkable speech, in which she declares that the child appears to have greater yearning for Symeon's affection than for her own: "Most reverend Sir," she cries, "receive [the child] who hurries to you rather than to me who gave him birth; receive him who yearns for you rather than for Joseph; receive him who, as it seems, considers his love for me his mother second to his affection for you..."³¹ Finally, the sermon describes how Mary gives her son to Symeon, who inclines his head so that he can speak to the infant in his arms: "The Mother of God said these things, and placed her son in the hands of the old man. But he inclined his face toward the child as quickly as possible..."³²

century). The following manuscripts ascribe the homily to George of Nicomedia: Chalki, Trade School, MS 10 (12th century); Athos, Laura, MS 456 (13th century); Athos, Protatou, MS 57 (13th or 14th century). See A. Ehrhard, *Überlieferung und Bestand der hagiographischen und homiletischen Literatur der griechischen Kirche*, pt. 1, vol. II, fasc. 2 (Leipzig, 1938), 203f.; *ibid.*, vol. III, fasc. 4 (1941), 472, 486f., 495f., 509ff.

²⁹ ... ὅσον ὑπόπτερόν τινα.... PG, 28, cols. 984C–985C.

³⁰ ἡ δὲ μικρὸν μὲν ἐπέσχευεν οὐ γὰρ πω σαφῶς ᾔδει τὴν ἐν Πνεύματι πρὸς τὸ ἱερὸν τοῦ γέροντος ἀφίξιν· ἔπειτα δ', ὡς τὸ θεῖον βρέφος ταῖς ταύτης ἀγκάλας ἑώρα περισκιρτῶν καὶ πρὸς τὰς ἐκείνου παλάμας παρεκπηδῆσαι φιλονεικοῦν, θάπτον τε γινώσκει τοῦ μυστηρίου τὴν δύναμιν, καὶ τῷ πρεσβύτῃ χειραπλοῦντι τοῦτο προσεπιδίδωσι. *Ibid.*, cols. 985C–988A.

³¹ Δέξαι, βοῶσα, γεραρώτερε ἀνθρώπε, τὸν πρὸς σὲ μᾶλλον ἢ πρὸς ἐμὲ τὴν τεκοῦσαν νῦν ἐπειγόμενον· δέξαι τὸν σὲ παροῦντα μᾶλλον ἢ ἰωσήφ· δέξαι τὸν δευτέραν τῆς σῆς φιλίας τὴν πρὸς ἐμὲ τὴν μητέρα στοργήν, ὡς ἔοικε, λογιζόμενον. *Ibid.*, col. 988A.

³² Ταῦτα εἶπεν ἡ Θεοτόκος, καὶ ταῖς τοῦ πρεσβύτου παλάμαις τὸν υἱὸν ἐπιτίθησιν. Ὁ δὲ, τὴν ὄψιν, ὡς εἶχε τάχος, τοῦτω προσεπικλίνει. *Ibid.*, col. 988A.



1. University of Chicago, MS 965, fol. 59v



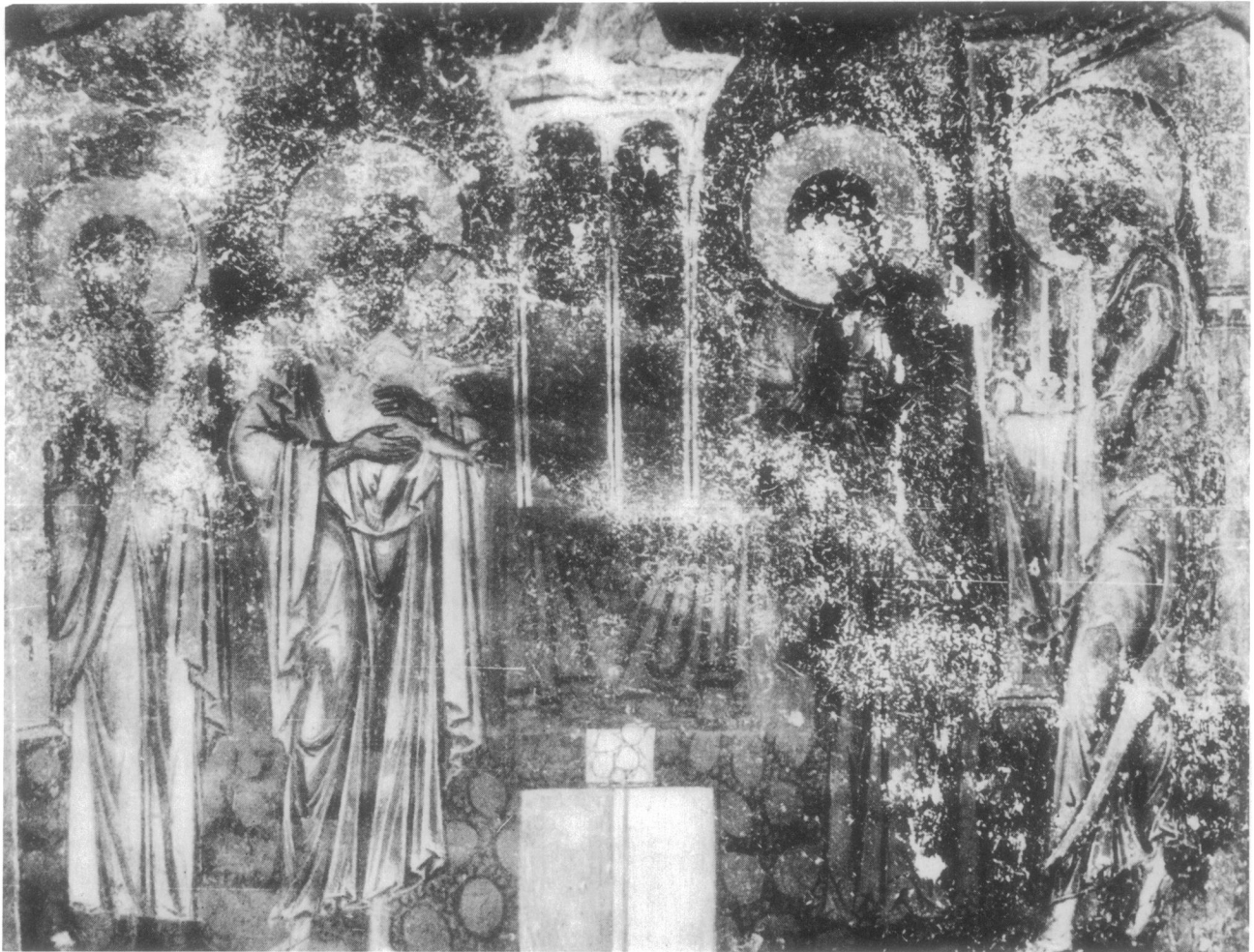
2. Istanbul, Kalenderhane Mosque. Mosaic



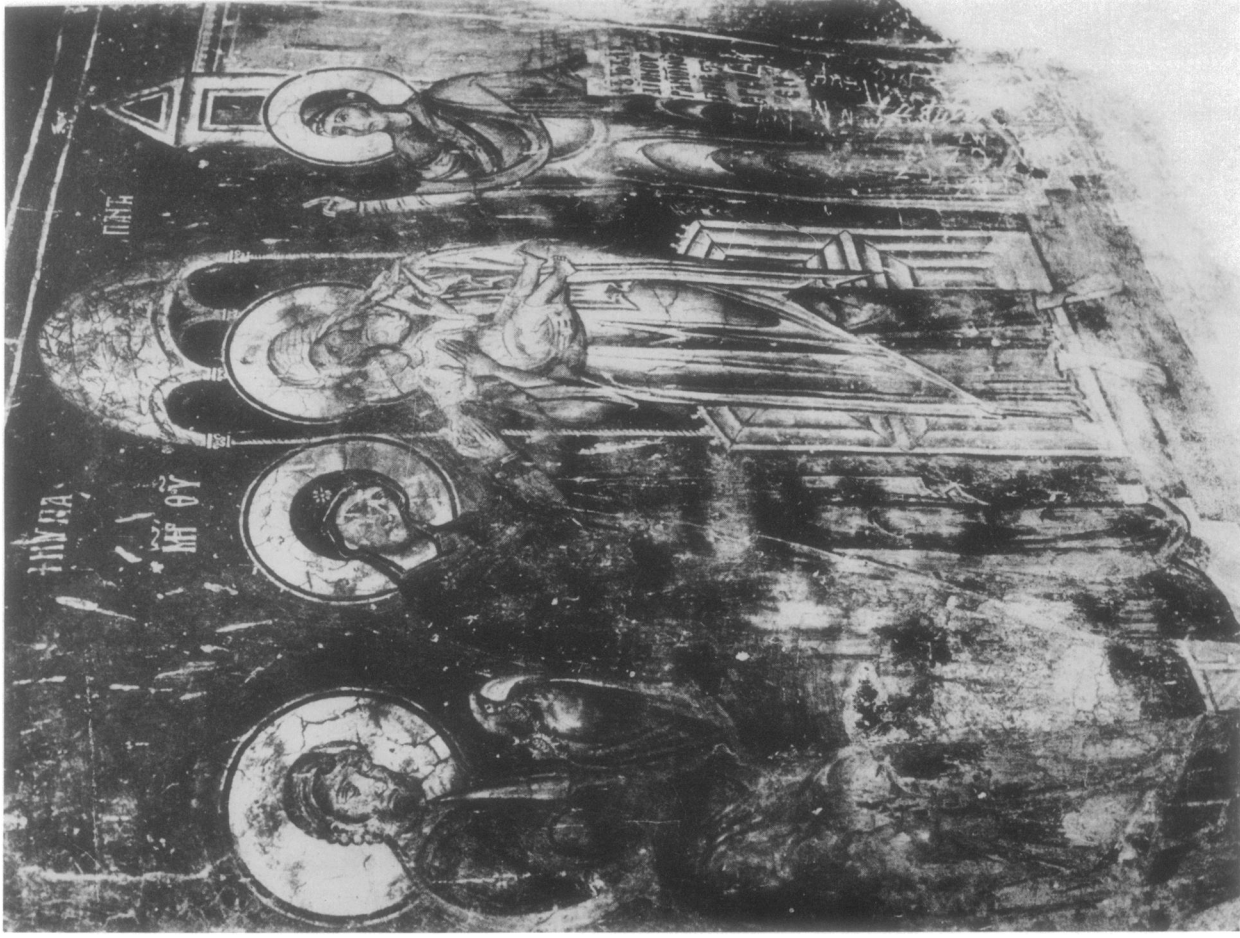
3. Nuremberg, Germanisches National-Museum, Golden Gospels, fol. 19



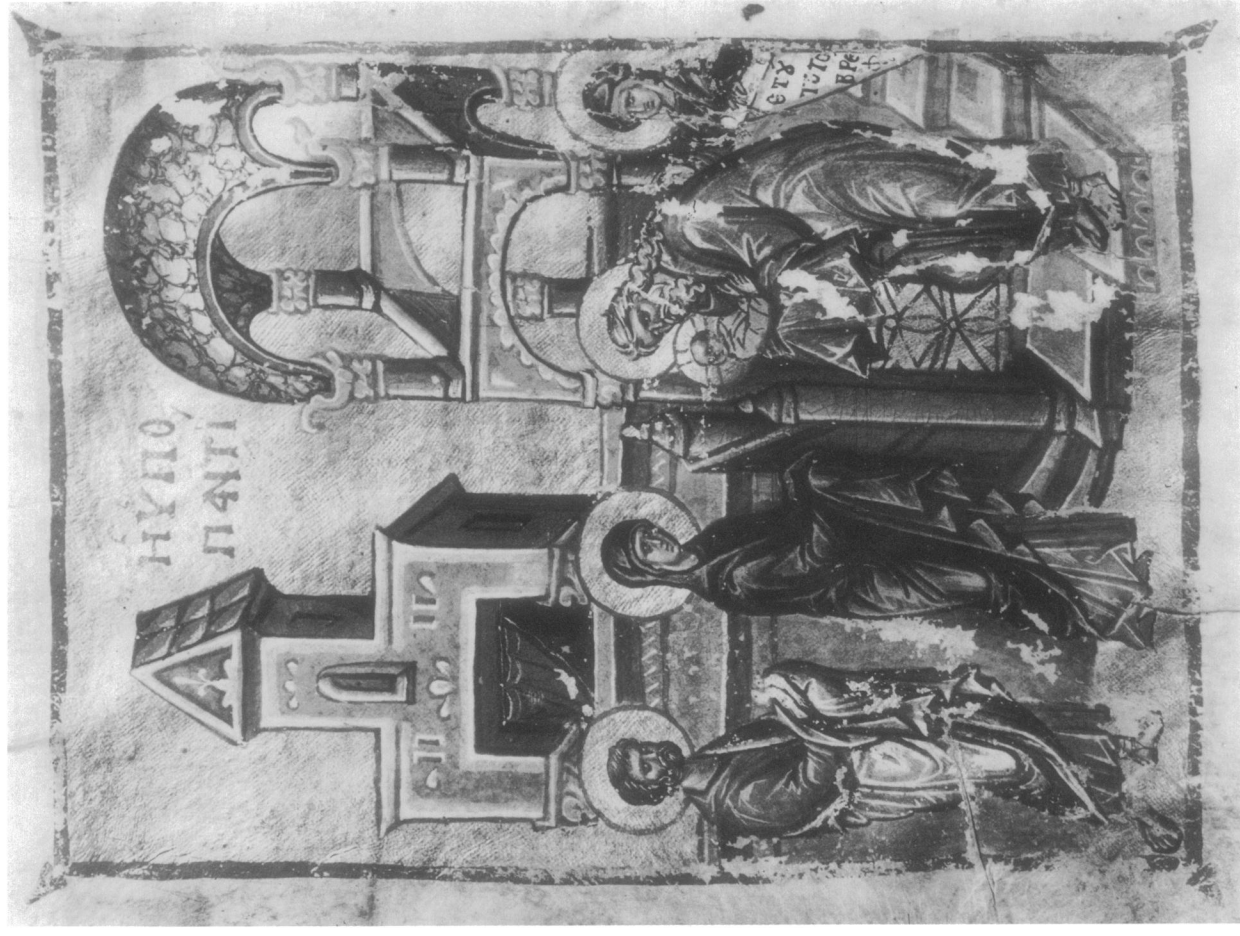
4. Vienna, National Library, MS theol. gr. 154, fol. 143



5. Kastoria, St. Nicholas tou Kasnitzē. Fresco



6. Kastoria, St. Stephen. Fresco



7. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS gr. th. f. 1, fol. 2v



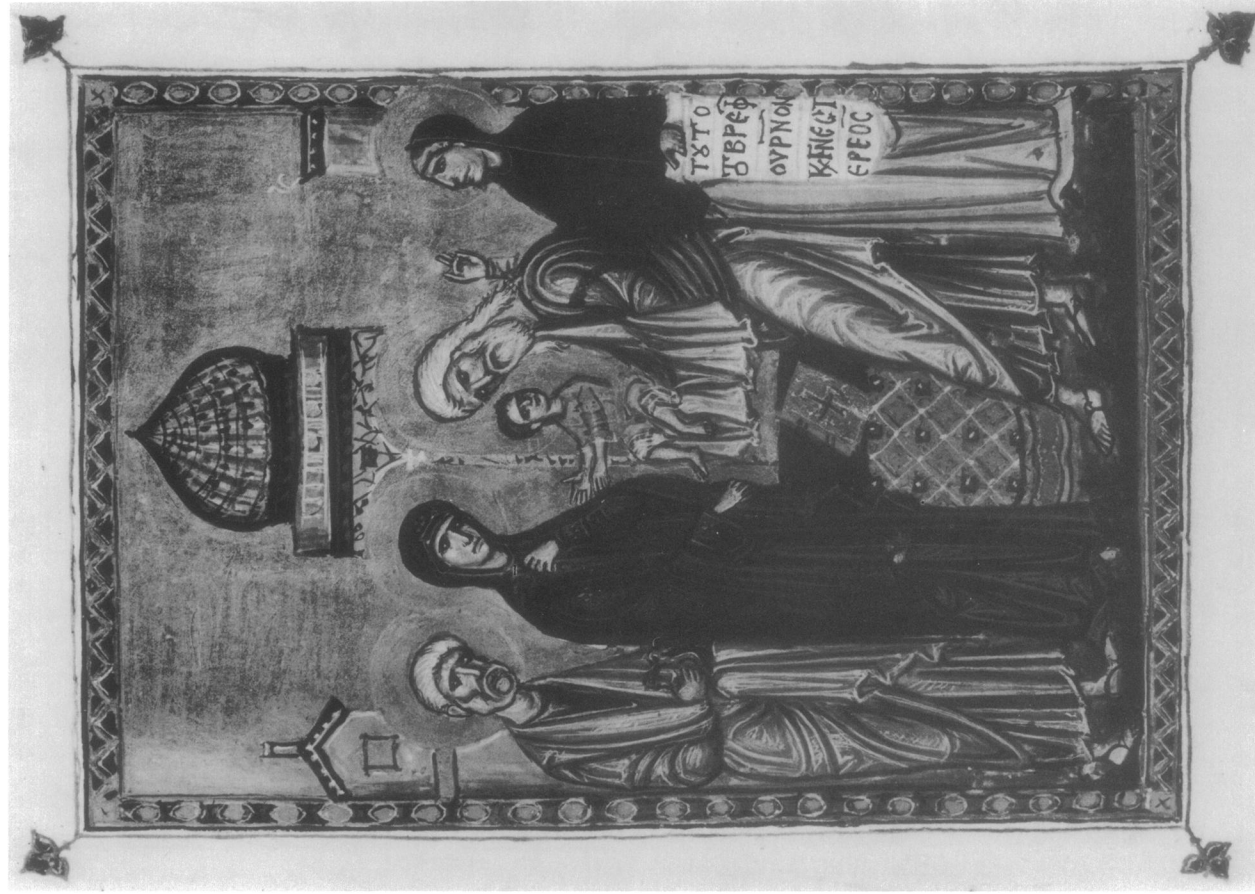
8. Monagri, Panagia Amasgou. Fresco, detail



9. Mount Sinai. Icon, detail



12. Mount Sinai. Icon, detail



13. Fol. 3



14. Fol. 8

Before we can proceed to a consideration of the influence which this sermon may have had on Byzantine art, it is necessary to determine its date and authorship.³³ Although some manuscripts attribute the homily to the fourth-century Father Athanasius of Alexandria, its contents are incompatible with his date. In the commentary on Symeon's prophecy, "This child is to be a sign which men dispute," the author gives a list of heretics which concludes with Eutyches and Nestorius, who lived a century after Athanasius.³⁴ On the other hand, there is much in the sermon which speaks in favor of an attribution to a posticonoclastic writer of the ninth century such as George of Nicomedia, whom several manuscripts list as the author. George of Nicomedia was chartophylax in the church of St. Sophia in Constantinople before he was appointed metropolitan of Nicomedia by his friend, the Patriarch Photius, in the year 860. The date of his death is not recorded, but it was after 880.³⁵ He is known to have written a number of homilies; the most frequently quoted of these sermons, a highly emotional description of Christ's death and burial, served as a source for the scenes of the Deposition and the Lamentation in Byzantine art.³⁶

Both the theology of the Presentation sermon and the language in which it is expressed accord well with the aftermath of Iconoclasm in the ninth century. There are parallels, for example, between this sermon and a famous homily by Photius which he delivered in 867 in the church of St. Sophia in Constantinople, on the occasion of the unveiling of the first image to be restored in the great church after it had been denuded

by the iconoclasts. The image in question, which is in all likelihood the mosaic still to be seen in the apse, portrays the Virgin enthroned with the Christ Child on her lap.³⁷ In his description of the mosaic, Photius focuses on the dispensation of the incarnation as evidenced by Mary holding her child in her arms: "A Virgin mother carrying in her pure arms the common creator reclining as a baby, for the common salvation of our kind—this great and ineffable mystery of the Dispensation."³⁸ In the introduction to the homily on the Presentation there is a similar passage which also expresses the dogma of the incarnation through the image of the Virgin holding her child. The author addresses St. Luke, and wonders at the evangelist's message that the Ancient of Days became an infant and that the son of God became the son of man. To this St. Luke replies: "Do not pay attention only to the wonder, but also to the Dispensation. For God is engendered thus as a naked baby and circumscribed in his mother's arms, not in his own nature, but having assumed the mortal nature, . . . for this is ineffable and altogether indescribable."³⁹

Another detail of the sermon which fits with a posticonoclastic date is the use of the term "circumscribed" (*perigraphetai*) to describe the incarnate Christ. The notion of circumscription played a large part in the later stages of the debate over images, particularly in the writings of Theodore, abbot of the Stoudion, and of the Patriarch Nicephorus.⁴⁰ Both of these writers attacked the iconoclastic argument of the Emperor Constantine Copronymus, who maintained that

³³ Ehrhard, *op. cit.*, pt. I, vol. II, fasc. 1, p. 47 note 4, ascribes the homily to George of Nicomedia. But see also F. J. Leroy, *L'homilétique de Proclus de Constantinople*, ST, 247 (Rome, 1967), 272; and R. Laurentin, "Bulletin sur la Vierge Marie," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, 52 (1968), 541.

³⁴ PG, 28, col. 992B-C.

³⁵ A. Ehrhard, in *LThK*, IV (Freiburg, 1932), 398; M. Jugie, *La mort et l'assomption de la Sainte Vierge*, ST, 114 (Rome, 1944), 263; H.-G. Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich* (Munich, 1959), 542f.

³⁶ PG, 100, cols. 1457-89. On the influence of this sermon on Byzantine art, see G. Millet, *Recherches sur l'iconographie de l'Evangile* (Paris, 1960), 467ff., 490ff.; and H. Maguire, "The Depiction of Sorrow in Middle Byzantine Art," *DOP*, 31 (1977), 162ff.

³⁷ C. Mango and E. J. W. Hawkins, "The Apse Mosaics of St. Sophia at Istanbul. Report on Work Carried Out in 1964," *DOP*, 19 (1965), 115ff., esp. 142f.

³⁸ Παρθένος μήτηρ, ἀγναῖς ἀγκάλαις τὸν κοινὸν φέρουσα πλάστην, εἰς κοινὴν τοῦ γένους σωτηρίαν ὡς βρέφος ἀνακλινόμενον, τὸ μέγα τοῦτο καὶ ἀφραστον τῆς οἰκονομίας μυστήριον! Ed. B. Laourdas (Thessaloniki, 1959), 167; trans. C. Mango, *The Homilies of Photius*, DOS, 3 (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), 290.

³⁹ . . . μὴ πρὸς τὸ θαῦμα μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ πρὸς τὴν οἰκονομίαν ἀπόβλεπε. Οὐ γὰρ Θεὸς οὕτως, ὡς ξφυ, γυμνὸς βρεφουργεῖται, καὶ μητρικαῖς ὠλέναις περιγράφεται, ἀλλὰ τὴν βροτείαν φύσιν ὑπειλημμένος, . . . ἄρρητον γὰρ τοῦτο, καὶ παντελῶς ἀνεμήνευτον. . . . PG, 28, col. 976C.

⁴⁰ See R. Martin, "The Dead Christ on the Cross in Byzantine Art," in *Late Classical and Mediaeval Studies* (note 6 *supra*), 189-96, esp. 193f.

Christ could not be delineated in art because, as God, he could not be circumscribed.⁴¹

The sermon on the Presentation, therefore, reflects in its language the theological debate over images which took place in the late eighth and ninth centuries. It also shows specific resemblances in its language to the known sermons of George of Nicomedia, especially the sermon on Christ's death and burial. In both the Presentation and the Passion sermons there is an emphasis on human sentiment which serves as a vehicle for the message of Christ's incarnation. In each sermon human emotion is projected primarily through rhetorical speeches which employ common techniques, especially antitheses, the repetition of key words, and the cumulation of sentences with similar structures. Thus, in the Passion sermon we hear the Virgin lamenting over the dead body of her son after he has been taken down from the cross: "Behold, your benign Dispensation has taken its end... For without breath you, the bestower of all breath, now recline in bodily form. Without breath is the body which I hold and kiss, [the body] of the maker of the life of the universe, the controller of my own breath. Without breath is he whom I now hold, whom lately I took in my arms as my own dearest one, whose sweetest words I heard."⁴² This speech, with its use of anaphora, can be compared to Christ's address to Symeon in the Presentation sermon, which the infant delivers while the old priest carries him in his arms: "An infant [I appear to you], as you see, still undeveloped in my bodily growth and like a baby. An infant, still bound tight in swaddling clothes, still grasping my mother's breasts with both my hands. An infant, still uttering inarticulate and mutilated speech because of the flesh I assumed from Mary. An infant embraced in your arms, but looking away from you at my

mother and at her breast."⁴³ Just as in the Virgin's lament, the reiteration of the first word of each clause adds emphasis to the successive images of Christ's human frailty and dependency, which in turn establish the truth of his incarnation.

In summary, many features of the Presentation sermon, its language, its strongly emotional tenor, and its theology support the attribution made by the manuscripts to the mid-ninth-century writer George of Nicomedia. By the twelfth century, at least, the sermon had been included as a reading in collections of homilies which were arranged according to the liturgical calendar. It remains for us to determine the influence of George of Nicomedia's sermon on the history of the Presentation in art. Since the homily places great emphasis on the holding of the child by Symeon, it may be significant that it was composed at approximately the same time as the Byzantine artists of Constantinople seem to have transferred the child from the arms of his mother to those of the priest, in the ninth-century decorations of the Virgin of the Source, of the church founded by Stylianus Zaoutzes, and of the Holy Apostles. However, because the precise date of the sermon within the career of George of Nicomedia is unknown, and because we have only the briefest descriptions of the ninth-century Presentation scenes, we cannot be certain that the sermon had an immediate effect upon the art of the capital. But we can with much more confidence attribute to the homily's influence the strong sentimental element which characterizes so many later Byzantine Presentation scenes, particularly at the end of the twelfth century. For example, the portrayals of Mary's apprehension could have been inspired by the text of the sermon, which relates that: "[The mother] held [the infant] back a little, for she did not yet clearly know that the old man had arrived at the temple in the Spirit."⁴⁴ The mother's hesitation is very evident in the fresco in St. Stephen's church at Kastoria, where she still grasps one of the hands of the baby whom she has entrusted to the priest's arms (fig. 6).

⁴¹ See, especially, Nicephorus, *Antirrheticus I adv. Constantinum Copronymum*, PG, 100, cols. 236C–D, 237A–B, 244B–D; *idem*, *Antirrheticus II*, *ibid.*, cols. 356A–357A; *idem*, *Antirrheticus III*, *ibid.*, col. 425C; Theodore of Stoudios, *Antirrheticus III adv. iconomachos*, PG, 99, cols. 392B–393D.

⁴² Ἰδοὺ τὰ τῆς φιλαγάθου σου πέρας ἀπέληφεν οἰκονομία·... Ἄπνους γὰρ νῦν σωματικῶς, ὁ πάσης πνοῆς χορηγός, ἀνακλίνῃ. Ἄπνουν κατέχω καὶ περιπτύσσομαι σῶμα τοῦ τῆς ζωῆς τῶν ὅλων δημιουργοῦ· τοῦ τὴν ἐμὴν περικρατοῦντος πνοήν. Ἄπνουν νῦν κατέχω, ὃν πρόωην ὡς οἰκεῖον ἐνηγκαλιζόμεν φίλτατον· οὗ τῶν ἡδίστων ἐπήκουον ῥημάτων· Oratio VIII, PG, 100, col. 1488A–B.

⁴³ νήπιος, ὡς ὄρᾳς, καὶ τὴν σωματικὴν ἡλικίαν τέως βρεφοφανῆς καὶ ἀτέλεστος· νήπιος ἔτι σπαργάνοις περισφιγγόμενος, ἔτι τῶν μητρῶων μαλῶν ἀμφοῖν περιδρασσόμενος ταῖν χερσίν· νήπιος, ἀσημόν τι καὶ περικομμένον ἔτι διὰ τὴν ἐκ Μαρίας σάρκα φθεγγόμενος· νήπιος ἀγκάλαις μὲν ταῖς σαῖς συνεχόμενος, ἀπροσκοπῶν δὲ πρὸς τὴν μητέρα καὶ τὸν μαλόν. PG, 28, col. 988C.

⁴⁴ *Supra*, note 30.

Likewise, the images of the child looking back at his mother, or struggling to return to her arms (figs. 1, 5, 7, 8), could have been inspired by Christ's address to Symeon, in which the child describes himself as: "An infant, embraced in your arms, but looking away from you at my mother..."⁴⁵ The sermon by George of Nicomedia may also have influenced the development of the sentimental motif of Symeon leaning his face against the child's head. Not only does the homily describe how the old priest "inclined his face toward the child as quickly as possible,"⁴⁶ but the text also directly compares the love between the son and his mother with the affection between the old man and the child. "Receive [the child] who hurries to you rather than to me who gave him birth," declares Mary to Symeon, "receive him who, as it seems, considers his love for me his mother second to his affection for you."⁴⁷ The visual counterparts of this passage are the images of Symeon holding the child so tenderly that he echoes the Virgin embracing her son. The late twelfth-century fresco of Symeon at Lagoudera, for example, mirrors a twelfth-century icon of the Virgin and Child which is preserved in the collection at Mount Sinai (figs. 10, 12).⁴⁸ In both images Mary and Symeon touch their cheeks gently against the child's head, and in each case the baby tugs with his left hand at their robes and kicks with his left foot.

THE MOURNING VIRGIN

There was a long tradition in Byzantine literature which related the Presentation of Christ to his mother's suffering at his death.⁴⁹ The association was based on Symeon's prophecy to Mary, as recorded by St. Luke (Luke 2:35): "And a sword will pierce through your own soul also." In the hymns and sermons on the Presentation these words were usually interpreted as a forecast of Mary's grief at the Crucifixion. Thus, in a canon which is sung on the feast of the Pre-

sentation, the eighth-century poet Cosmas explains: "Symeon announced to the Mother of God, 'And a sword will pass through your heart, Immaculate one, when you see your son on the cross.'"⁵⁰ A homily ascribed to the seventh-century Bishop Leontius of Neapolis provides a similar interpretation of Symeon's words: "I think that the sword means the trial which came upon the holy Virgin at the cross on account of her grief."⁵¹ In the sermon on the Presentation by George of Nicomedia the infant Christ himself describes the forthcoming events of his Passion, even as he is cradled in the old man's arms: "An infant, embraced in your arms... this is how it is now. But a little later... I will be betrayed, I shall be brought in public before Caiaphas, I shall be spat upon, buffeted, and flagellated. Finally I shall be crucified and pierced with a lance and enclosed in a tomb like a corpse..."⁵² Later in the same sermon George of Nicomedia tells how Symeon, at Mary's insistence, explains to her the full meaning of his prophecy. Mary, says the priest, will see her son betrayed, humiliated, and put to death, and "...because of this a sword will go through your soul. Because of this you will weep and beat your breast, and as a mother you will lament for your son, who will submit to the death of criminals."⁵³

Just as Symeon foretold Mary's grief at the death of her son, so, too, did she in her laments remember the words of the old priest's pro-

⁵⁰ Καὶ σοῦ τὴν καρδίαν, "Ἀφ' ὅρου, ῥομφαία διελεύσεται, Συμεὼν τῇ Θεοτόκῃ προηγόρευσεν, ἐν Σταυρῷ καθορώσης σὸν Υἱόν... Μηναιά, III (Rome, 1896), 485 (seventh ode); F. Mercenier, *La prière des églises de rite byzantin*, II, 1 (Chevetogne, 1953), 331. Compare the *Kontakion* on the Presentation by Romanos, ed. Grosdidier de Matons (note 8 *supra*), 190.

⁵¹ "Ρομφαίαν δὲ οἶμαι λέγεσθαι, τὴν ἐπὶ τοῦ σταυροῦ γενομένην τῇ ἁγίᾳ Παρθένῳ διὰ τῆς λύπης δοκιμασίαν. *Sermo in Symeonem*, PG, 93, col. 1580C. See also the sermons on the Presentation by Amphilochius of Iconium (PG, 39, col. 57A-B) and Sophronius of Jerusalem (PG, 87, III, col. 3298).

⁵² νήπιος ἀγκάλαις μὲν ταῖς σαῖς συνεχόμενος... Καὶ νῦν μὲν ταῦτα· μικρὸν δὲ ὕστερον, ... προδοθήσομαι, καὶ δῆμιος πρὸς Καϊάφαν ἀχθήσομαι, καὶ ἐμπτυσθήσομαι, καὶ κολαφισθήσομαι, φραγελλωθήσομαι· τέλος σταυρωθήσομαι καὶ λόγχῃ νυγήσομαι, καὶ τάφῳ νεκροφανῶς συγκλεισθήσομαι... PG, 28, col. 988C.

⁵³ διὰ ταῦτα, σοῦ τὴν ψυχὴν διελεύσεται ῥομφαία· διὰ ταῦτα κλάσεις καὶ κόψη, καὶ οἷα μήτηρ θρηνησεις ἐπὶ Υἱῷ, τὸν τῶν κακούργων ὑπομένοντι θάνατον· *Ibid.*, col. 996C.

⁴⁵ *Supra*, note 43.

⁴⁶ *Supra*, note 32.

⁴⁷ *Supra*, note 31.

⁴⁸ Sotiriou, *op. cit.* (note 20 *supra*), I, pls. 54-55; *ibid.*, II, 73-75. The Virgin is of the Cypriot Kykottissa type.

⁴⁹ D. I. Pallas, *Die Passion und Bestattung Christi in Byzanz. Der Ritus—Das Bild*, *Miscellanea Byzantina Monacensia*, 2 (Munich, 1965), 174ff.

phesy. In a canon by Cosmas, which is sung at Matins on the Saturday of Holy Week, the Virgin declares: "Now, my God, seeing you a corpse without breath I am dreadfully torn by the sword of grief."⁵⁴ A more explicit reference to the Presentation is made by the Virgin's cry in the *Epitaphios Threnos*, the long lament which from the fourteenth century has formed part of the liturgy for the Saturday morning: "Alas! The prophecy of Symeon is fulfilled. For your sword ran through my heart, Emmanuel."⁵⁵ In a prose lament which has been attributed to the tenth-century author Symeon Metaphrastes, the Virgin blesses Symeon because "... prophets prophesied both joy and glory for me, but he alone forecast gloom and grief."⁵⁶ The Virgin makes her most dramatic invocation in a sermon by Germanus II, in which she calls out: "O Symeon, Symeon, sharpest in seeing through the soul, even if the eyes of your body became dim; strong in prediction, even if your voice was infirm from age. The sword came! It goes through my heart. It tears me inside."⁵⁷

The association of Symeon's prophecy with Mary's grief at her son's death was discreetly alluded to in the iconography of the Presentation in Byzantine art. The transfer of the child from the arms of his mother to the embrace of Symeon enabled Mary to respond to his prophecy in the form of a proleptic gesture of sorrow

which anticipated her role at the Crucifixion. The earliest surviving Presentation scene which shows the Virgin mourning is the miniature in the eleventh-century Gospel Book in Vienna, which shows her standing with her head inclined and her chin resting on her left hand (fig. 4), a pose of grief which she often adopts in paintings of the Crucifixion.⁵⁸ The Virgin was also shown grieving in the Presentation miniature of the Rockefeller-McCormick New Testament (fig. 1). Sometimes Byzantine artists emphasized the relationship between the Crucifixion and the Presentation by juxtaposing the two scenes while they repeated the mother's gesture of grief. In the late twelfth-century frescoes of the church of the Hagioi Anargyroi at Kastoria, for example, the Presentation and the Crucifixion face each other across the western half of the nave. In each scene the Virgin raises her left hand to her face and stretches out her right hand toward her son; thus the mother's gestures of sorrow echo each other from either side of the church.⁵⁹

In some Byzantine Crucifixion scenes the Virgin expresses her grief by holding the edge of her mantle, as if she were about to pull on it in order to veil her face.⁶⁰ This gesture, also, was foreshadowed in depictions of the Presentation. In the early thirteenth-century fresco in the church of Panagia Amasgou at Monagri the mother stands bowing her head slightly and grasping the hem of her mantle between the thumb and fingers of her left hand, while Symeon embraces her child. This painting is on the south side of the nave vault, directly opposite the damaged Crucifixion scene, which was depicted on the north side (fig. 8).⁶¹ Mary also holds the edge of her mantle in a miniature of the Presentation in Queen Melisende's Psalter, which was copied by a Western artist at Jerusalem from a Byzantine model, probably between 1131 and 1143 (fig. 13).⁶² Here the action of grasping the

⁵⁴ Νῦν δέ σε, Θεέ μου, ἄπνουν ὁρῶσα νεκρόν, τῇ ῥομφαίᾳ τῆς λύπης σπαράττομαι δεινῶς. PG, 98, col. 488C–D (ninth ode); Mercenier, *op. cit.*, II, 2, 251.

⁵⁵ Θεῦ! τοῦ Συμεών, ἐκτετέλεσται ἡ προφητεία· ἡ γὰρ σὴ ῥομφαία διέδραμε, τὴν ἐμὴν καρδίαν Ἐμμανουήλ. *Triodion* (Athens, 1960), 422; Mercenier, *op. cit.*, II, 2, 237. On the date of the *Epitaphios Threnos*, see Pallas, *op. cit.*, 61–66; and N. B. Tomadakes, *Εισαγωγή εἰς τὴν Βυζαντινὴν φιλολογίαν*, 3rd ed., II (Athens, 1965), 76–79.

⁵⁶ Προφῆται γὰρ καὶ τὰ χαροποιὰ καὶ τὰ τῆς δόξης μοι προεφῆτευσαν· αὐτὸς δὲ μόνος τὰ σκυθρωπὰ καὶ τὰ τῆς λύπης προείπετο. *Oratio in lugubrem lamentationem sanctissimae Deiparae*, PG, 114, col. 216C. In a manuscript in Bucharest the same lament is ascribed to the twelfth-century writer Nikephoros Basilakes; see A. Pignani, "Un' etopea inedita di Niceforo Basilace," *Bollettino del Comitato per la preparazione dell' Edizione Nazionale dei Classici Greci e Latini*, N.S. 19 (1971), 131–46.

⁵⁷ ὦ Συμεών, Συμεών! ὦ τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς διόπτραν ὀξύτατε, εἰ καὶ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς ἡμβλύνου τοῦ σώματος! ὦ τὴν πρόρρησιν κραταίε, εἰ καὶ τὴν φωνὴν ἡρώστες γεροντικῶς. Ἀφίκετο ἡ ῥομφαία· διεμβαίνει μου τὴν καρδίαν· σπαράττει τὰ σπλάγχχνα μου. In *Dominici corporis sepulchrum*, PG, 98, col. 272C.

⁵⁸ The history and significance of this gesture in Crucifixion iconography are discussed in Maguire, *op. cit.* (note 36 *supra*), 144–45.

⁵⁹ Pelekanidis, *op. cit.* (note 16 *supra*), I, pls. 16, 20.

⁶⁰ The history and meaning of this gesture are examined in Maguire, *op. cit.*, 156–58.

⁶¹ Mary's gesture is no longer visible in the Crucifixion scene, as the upper portion is lost; see Boyd, *op. cit.* (note 2 *supra*), fig. 32.

⁶² London, British Library, MS Egerton 1139, fol. 3; the significance of the gesture is missed in H. Buchthal, *Miniature Painting in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Oxford, 1957), 3ff., pl. 3.

cloth is more explicitly portrayed. In another miniature in the same manuscript Mary repeats the gesture as she mourns beside her crucified son (fig. 14).⁶³ The Virgin was also depicted holding the border of her mantle in the late twelfth-century mosaic of the Presentation at Monreale in Sicily.⁶⁴

Although the earliest existing version of the Presentation which shows the Virgin in a pose of grief dates to the eleventh century, the tenth-century *ekphrasis* by Constantine the Rhodian suggests that she may already have been shown mourning in the lost mosaic in the church of the Holy Apostles. Constantine not only said that Symeon was carrying the infant Christ in his arms, but he also imagined that the priest was warning the Virgin of her impending sorrow, which will be: "...a bitter two-edged sword of grief passing through your soul."⁶⁵ Thus, it is possible that the iconography of Symeon holding the Christ Child was already accompanied by Mary's proleptic gesture of sorrow in a mosaic which could be seen in Constantinople in the first half of the tenth century.

Finally, it may be observed that Mary's gesture of grief was not the only means by which Byzantine artists created links between the Presentation and the Passion. In the frescoes at Lagoudera the icon of Symeon with the Christ Child on the north wall acquires additional shades of meaning through its association with other images in the church. Beside Symeon stands St. John the Baptist, holding a scroll inscribed "Behold the Lamb of God..." (fig. 10). On the south wall of the church, directly oppo-

site Symeon, is the standing image of the Virgin Mary "Arakiotissa" (fig. 11).⁶⁶ This fresco portrays Mary with the infant Christ reclining in her arms, while on each side an angel proffers the symbols of the Passion. Thus, the grouping of images around the portrayal of Symeon at Lagoudera makes the holding of the child by the priest a clear reference to the coming sacrifice.

CONCLUSION

The sermon on the Presentation which is ascribed by some manuscripts to Athanasius was in fact composed by George of Nicomedia during the aftermath of Iconoclasm and reflects the theology of that epoch. Like his homily on Christ's crucifixion and burial, George's sermon on the Presentation appears to have had a considerable impact on the iconography of Byzantine art. It may have been connected with the earliest ninth-century depictions of Symeon holding the Christ Child, and it very probably helped Byzantine artists to visualize the more sentimental portrayals of the Presentation which they created in the second half of the twelfth century. Once the artists had transferred the child to the arms of Symeon, they could allude to the priest's prophecy by depicting the Virgin in poses of mourning which echoed her role at the Crucifixion. Though they may appear inconspicuous today, Mary's gestures of grief in illustrations of the Presentation were intended to evoke a rich tradition in the literature of the Byzantine Church.

⁶³ Folio 8; see *ibid.*, 4, pl. 8.

⁶⁴ Kitzinger, *op. cit.* (note 19 *supra*), fig. 4.

⁶⁵ ψυχὴν δὲ τὴν σὴν δίστομον λύπης ξίφος
πικρὸν διελθόν . . .

Ed. Legrand, *op. cit.* (note 6 *supra*), 59, v. 785f.

⁶⁶ On this painting, see R. Hamann-Mac Lean, *Die Monumentalmalerei in Serbien und Makedonien*, II, *Grundlegung zu einer Geschichte der mittelalterlichen Monumentalmalerei in Serbien und Makedonien* (Giessen, 1976), 60ff., with earlier bibliography.